Forgotten Hideouts of Billy the Kid

by

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FORGOTTEN HIDEOUTS OF BILLY THE KID

To Glen, Dec 1, 1992.

You'll find some of your sayings here. Hope you enjoy it. The other had so many typos so here another revised copy!

The Ben

BY

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ABSTRACT

During the Lincoln County War, William H. Bonney alias Billy the Kid is reported to have used a hideout in a rocky gorge of Bluewater Canyon (Coe 1969: 37), near San Patricio, New Mexico. Subsequently, two other Billy the Kid hideouts have been found by the author, one near White Oaks, the other near Fort Selden. The last two hideouts have rocks with the names or initials of Billy the Kid and some of his gang members such as Charles Bowdre, Tom O'Folliard, and Dave Radabaugh. These hideouts become the focus of this book, the forgotten hideouts of Billy of the Kid, especially the Robledo Mountain hideout near Fort Selden. Archaeological and historical evidence indicate that this hideout was used by Billy the Kid and his gang in the year 1880. Information is presented in explaining how the site was dated, and a brief historical background of each outlaw that placed his name in the hideout. Photographs are included of the outlaws hideout and of their names that have withstood the elements now for well over a century.

INTRODUCTION

Time once again has caught up with me, and here I sit in front of this word processor, pondering what I have seen, writing down the story of some of Billy the Kid's hideouts that I have stumbled across while exploring southern New Mexico. With a sore back from two days hard ridin' on my motorcycle looking for an 1830 period Mexican petroglyph, and vericose veins that should be on man twice my age I keep wondering what makes me write this stuff down. I can understand that part of me that always wants to explore the landscapes, but what is it that draws me to this word processor. Hell, like everybody else I have a thousand other things I need to do, but somehow I have to take time out and do this, this endless banging away at keys while the pleasant October days follow each other into autumn. Those that can, do, those that can not, teach. I attempt both. I choose to chronicle my own homelands in the capacity of a historic archaeologist, cultural historian, archivalist, and grass root historian in touch with the people, places, and lore of the Tularosa Basin and peripheries. Outside, one-half mile from my front door lies the grave site of Ralph Randolph Reynolds. The tombstone of polished granite has chiseled these words "Rode with Billy The Kid". Across the creek (Tularosa Creek), lies an old ruined adobe, surrounded by huge cottonwood trees, where this man homesteaded. Up river a few miles is the Old Blazer Mill, where Billy the Kid, Dick Brewer, Tom Offoliard, Charlie Bowdre, and others of the Regulators battled with Buckshot Roberts during a violent episode of the Lincoln County War. I am naturally drawn

to such stories, and having tired of reading the same old accounts of those days for over 25 years, I applied myself to ferreting out those stories that have never been told. To tell these stories, write these stories, and chronicle my homelands is what drive these fingers as they zip through history at a rate of about 80 words a minute. Archaeology became a tool, a necessity, when it came to explaining many of the archaeological sites my eyes have gazed on.

I admit I am lucky to have been born an archaeologist, growing up during a time that archaeology blossomed, allowing a fellow to make a living by doing nothing much but archaeology. My acquaintance with southern New Mexico over my lifetime has enabled me also to evaluate the people and the land and come out with an interesting, factual account of that legacy. What I do in everyday life is different from what most do in main-stream American society. Most of my waking hours are consumed in reviewing maps, walking canyons and ridges, reading 19th century documents, consulting courthouse records, meeting with other archaeologists, and writing, collating, pasting, and editing too damn much paperwork.

In order to generate this paper work I regularly tear up and otherwise destroy my Toyota 4-WD pickup with the traditional 200,000 plus miles on it, and I wreak havoc on my body and 500 Honda dirt bike complete with knobby tires. But somehow, I always end up on my feet walking. These walks are in fact the most important part of all I do, for it is while on these walks that I encounter stories. In the sixteen years that I have been

a professional archaeologist, I have somehow drifted into telling stories about the Apaches, outlaws, and other stories based on facts derived from the local archaeological sites. These sites become informative when the pertinent historical background information is presented that interprets the archaeological site.

My involvement with William H. Bonney alias "Billy the Kid" began in 1976, when I was driven to the northern Tularosa Basin in a quest. Before I had finished, I had performed a fairly intensive survey, and located about one hundred prehistoric petroglyph sites from OroGrande, New Mexico north to Corona, New Mexico. This survey took many years to complete. Before I had finished, I had found a petroglyph I believe was made by Billy the Kid during the time Billy was selling stolen cattle to Pat Coughlan who owned the Three Rivers Ranch. This was during the late 1870s and early 1880s. The stone is inscribed "Billy Kid", there being no "the" in the name. I recorded this back in 1977, but as I was a poor college student, I had no camera much less money for film. The stone is located in a saddled on a ridge near a box canyon and seep spring. From this site, Billy could see in every direction for many miles. His herd of stolen cattle would be hidden and easily managed and watered by the box canyon and seep spring.

In spite of what most people think archaeologists do, like dig dinosaur bones (a paleontologist) or perhaps seek gold in Victoria Peak (a treasure hunter), I have spent my life instead on interesting excavations at such places as beneath Mesilla

Plaza, Frenchy's Cabin, the Rough and Ready stage station of Butterfield's, Oliver Lee's Dog Canyon Ranch, and the McSween House in Lincoln where a five day gun battle waged between McSween's men and those of Murphy's. In addition to these excavations, I have walked on countless archaeological projects cranking up thousands of miles of walking like any good archaeologist is supposed to do if he wants to keep from starving to death, or worse yet, getting stuck in the lab. Such wandering and digging has made me informed and trained to milk archaeological sites of all their inherent, kinetic information that pertains to the study of man. For me, that study means southern New Mexico, the center of the universe.

Ironically, the next hideout and story of Billy the Kid I ran across caught me sitting on my butt, in the Las Cruces office, analyzing artifacts from a fiber optic line. I was going brain dead counting a bunch of glass sherds and fragments of cans we had dug up, when in walks a stranger looking for me. He was a Butterfield Trail buff and wanted to milk me of information I had acquired through thousands of miles of walking and reading. Being brain dead I subsequently forgot his name or what he looks like, but I never forgot the story he told me about the Robledo Mountain Hideout of Billy the Kid and his gang. I paid particular attention to his description on how to get to the site.

A few weeks later, I woke up in a bored-with-the-present-century mood and set out to locate this hideout used by Billy th Kid and his gang of cattle rustlers. I left Las Cruces and took the old

highway north to Leasburg, New Mexico. Leasburg had once been a rip-roaring town that boasted its share of prostitutes, saloons, and bad men. A few miles north of Leasburg lie the ruins of Fort Selden. Soldiers from this military post frequented the rowdy frontier town of Leasburg, and gave it a bad reputation with their violent and drunken behavior. But perhaps Billy and his gang enjoyed it, and the nearby river-boat ferry, which was located northwest of Fort Selden. I passed the adobe ruins of the frontier fort and kept to the old road a few more miles, crossing the river near where the ferry was in the 1870s and 1880s.

North of the fort, the Robledo Mountains come right on down to the river. A few miles north of the fort, I turned west up a major canyon on a dirt road that follows the same course of the old Silver City - Fort Selden wagon road that was used in Billy's day. I parked a few miles further and scouted up a sandy side-canyon just west of a steep, pointed hill. After walking a few hundred yards, my eyes gazed upon a small protective, sheltered area near some hackberry? trees about 200 feet above the sandy canyon. I scrambled up the west face of the steep hill and in a few minutes found another hideout of Billy the Kid's. This site contained the names or initials of his outlaw band next to the two of Billy's. Billy's and my trail had crossed a second time, and from this site I eventually had enough information for another book that needed to be told before the outlaws names completely disappear from this rock ledge due to natural environmental conditions. As with most sites of this nature,

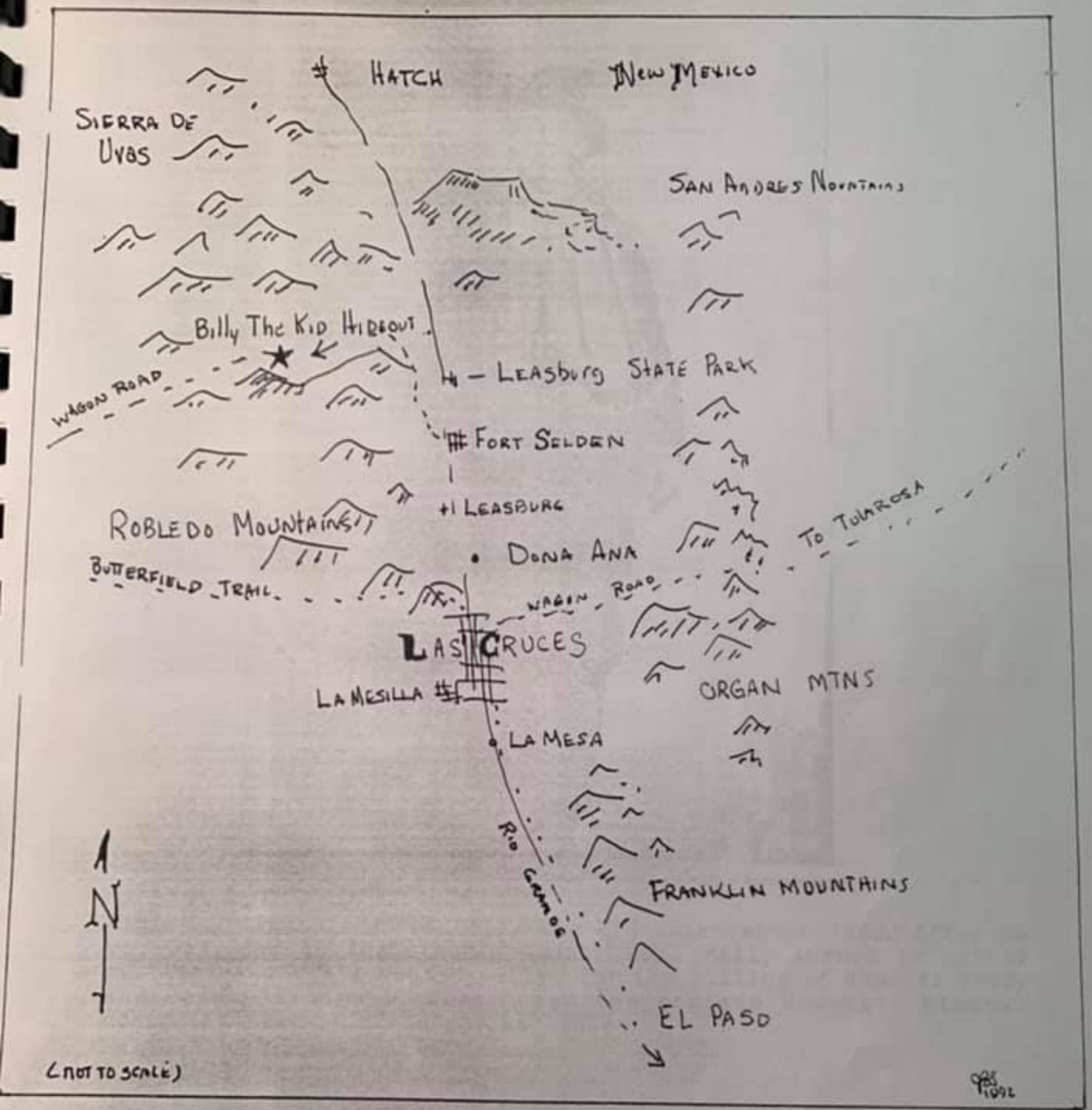
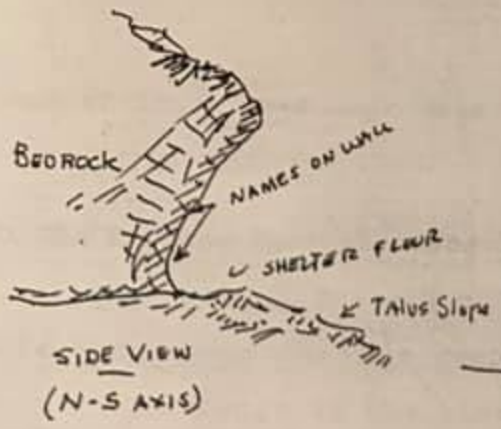


Figure 1 Map of Mesilla Valley showing principal settlements during the time that Billy the Kid and his gang frequented the area. Fort Selden and Leasburg, north of Las Cruces offered entertainment and communication when using the Robledo Mountain hideout. The wagon road to Silver City could be kept under surveillance by Billy and his gang from a vantage point north a few feet from where the outlaws placed their names in the hideout.

— M. G. Fulton Collection, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library

Figure 2 Photograph of Billy the Kid taken about 1880. After he was defeated in the Lincoln County War, Billy turned to cattle rustling and was a wanted outlaw for the killing of Sheriff Brady and Deputy Hindman. Billy used the Robledo Mountain hideout about the time this tintype was taken.

Site Map of Billy the Kids Robledo Mountain Hideout



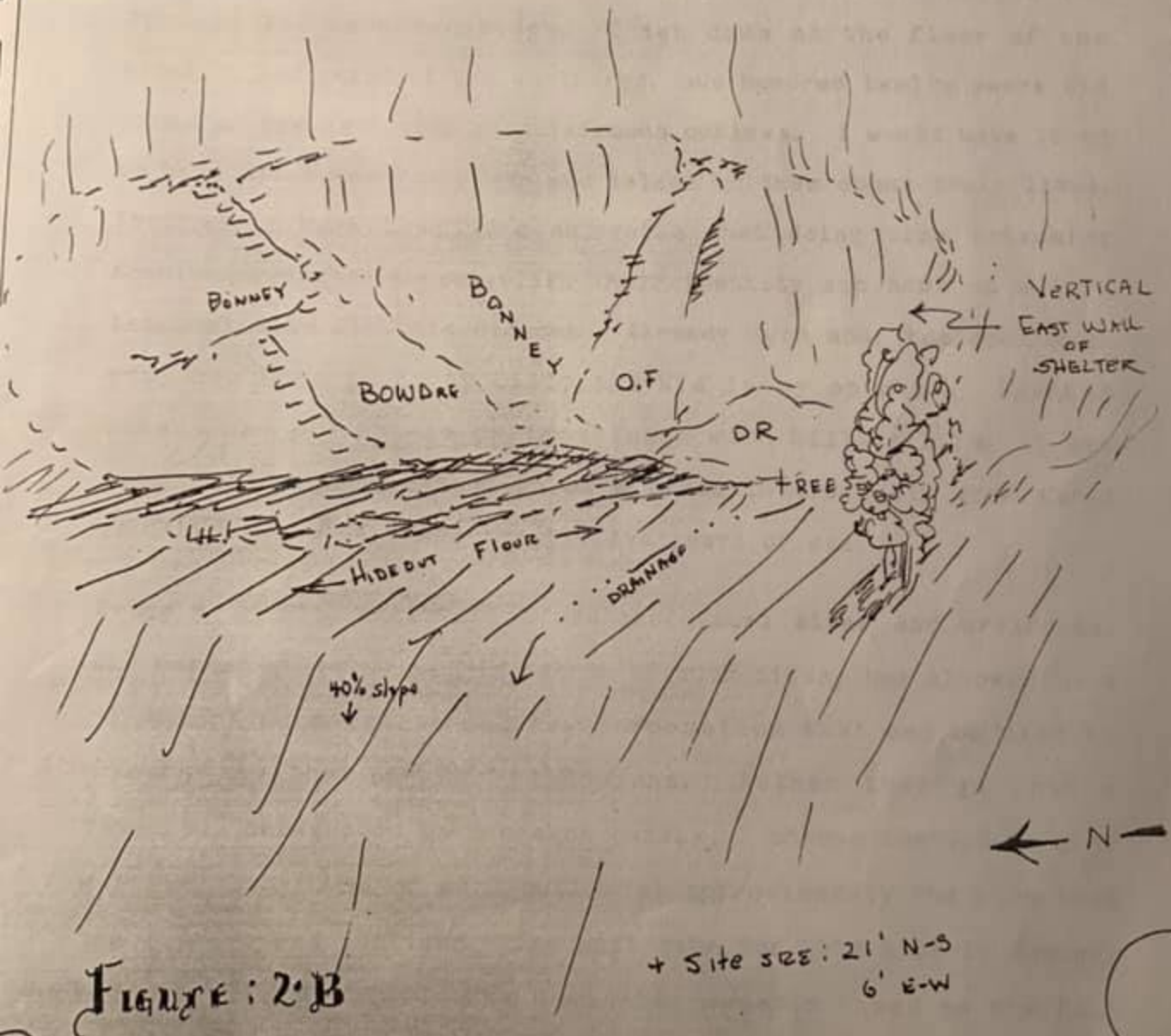


FIGURE : 2·B

+ Site size: 21' N-S
6' E-W

none of these have ever been documented. They have to be found in order to document them.

At the Robledo Mountain Hideout Site, Billy preferred to use his last name, Bonney, instead of Billy Kid as found on the previous site near Carrizozo. His companions who also placed their names on the rock ledge in the hideout were Tom O'Folliard, Charles Bowdre, and Dave Radabaugh. I sat down on the floor of the hideout and gazed at the weathered, one hundred twelve years old names of New Mexicos's most infamous outlaws. I would have liked to have met these young men and talked to them about their lives. That would have been more enjoyable that doing time consuming archival research to establish their identity and come up with a temporal date for this hideout. Already much ado, too damn much ado, has been given to Billy the Kid in my opinion. Perhaps others can appreciate my impatience with Billy's life, it has been hashed and re-hashed so many times I personally grew tired of it by the time I was twenty-five years of age.

Being a trained observer of archaeological sites and artifacts, and compelled to wander in search of such sites, has allowed me a different perspective and new information that can be used to complement that of the historians. Rather than go into a detailed background on the each outlaw, I choose instead to give a brief background of each outlaw at approximately the time that the hideout was utilized. The best date for this site is January 1880 to October 1880. The beginning date is based on the fact that Dave Radabaugh joined Billy's gang in January 1880 and his initials D. R., are found on the site. The later date is based

on the fact that Billy and his band were in the White Oaks area by November 1880. By December 1880, Tom O'Folliard and Charlie Bowdre were killed by Pat Garrett and Poe's posse, while Billy and Dave were arrested and placed in jail.

Since I have been able to date this site to 1880, I could limit myself to the outlaws activities shortly before three of them were shot down. Instead, I have chose to present background information of these outlaws as they became acquainted with each other and later rode together beginning in 1877 and ending with their deaths in 1880 and 1881. This background information will allow a more meaningful interpretation of this hideout, and hopefully, an appreciation for archaeological and historical inquiry concerning the American West.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON BILLY THE KID'S OUTLAW BAND

William H. Bonney, alias Billy the Kid, was likely born in New York on November 23, 1859. He was 21 years seven months, and three weeks of age when he was shot down by Garrett on the 14th of July 1881. By 1873, Billy moved to Silver City, during which time his mother was married to William Antrim, Billy's step-father. After killing a man in Arizona Territory, Billy fled to the Lincoln area in 1877. Much of his time was spent with the Coes, who had a homestead on the Ruidoso River.

Even earlier, a fellow by the name of Charles Bowdre is mentioned as having a ranch on the Ruidoso (Fulton 1968: 79). The summer of 1876 saw Charles Bowdre and other local ranchers chasing a

Blazer's Mill on the Rio Tularosa, on the present Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation. Both Billy and Bowdre are credited with the fatal gut shot that killed Buckshot Roberts, depending on the source (Fulton 1968: Blazer August 6, 1928). Bowdre almost bought the farm when his gun belt was shot off by Roberts. Dick Brewer, Ruidoso River rancher, Regulator, lost his head when Roberts shot it off at a distance of 200 yards by Roberts; himself bleeding, gutshot and mortally wounded. He died the next day and was buried in the nearby cemetery near the mill.

Indictments were issued against Bonney and Bowdre for the killing of Buckshot Roberts and the Brady and Hindman killings that took place in April 1, 1878 (Fulton 1968:201, 158). Being outlaws now, they had little or no remorse in becoming cattle rustlers. This would alienate them against the many once sympathetic ranchers who believed that Billy had got a rotten deal in the courts and from the Murphy, Dolan Riley faction, backed by the corrupt Santa Fe Ring. Now they were common thieves, and on their way to becoming the "scrourge of the cattlemen".

The next mention of Bowdre and Billy is made a month later, in May 1878, when Bowdre and likely Billy reportedly raided a Dolan and Riley cow camp located on the Pecos River near Seven Rivers (Fulton 1968:225). It was about this time that Tom O'Folliard, lately from Texas, joined the outlaw gang. Tom had no previous criminal record and it was unfortunate that this individual crossed Billy's trail, for it cost him his life. Billy and Tom became constant companions while they stayed one step ahead of the law during this time. They shared some hair raising

gunfights, and perhaps the most desperate of all, that gunfight that became recorded as the Five Day Battle. With the McSween house burning all around them, set on fire by the Murphy men, and surrounded by gunmen out for their blood, Billy, Bowdre, and Tom O'Folliard escaped in a fury of gun fire. The Murphy men killed McSween and others, but the core of the gang lived (Fulton 1968:249). This marked the high point in the Lincoln County War.

On March 5, 1879, arrest warrants were issued for Tom O'Folliard and he joined Bowdre and Billy Bonney in this distinction (Fulton 1968:333). Scarcely more than two weeks after the warrants were issued, Billy and Tom O'Folliard were arrested in Lincoln. Later released, Tom showed up in Lincoln again in September 1879 to protect Mrs. McSween from harassment and possible bodily harm at the hands of Murphy's men (Fulton 1968:286). A month later, Bonney, O'Folliard, Bowdre, and Doc Scurlock, and two Hispanic men stole one hundred head of cattle from the Texas panhandle (Fulton 1968:371). It was at this time that Joshiah G."Doc" Scurlock, a former Regulator and Lincoln County War veteran and rancher quit Billy the Kid's gang and returned to Kansas, likely escaping a premature death (Fulton 1968:371-372). Scurlock had a ranch upriver from Bowdre, and had become good friends, but he knew he had to leave his ranch, dreams, and friends behind if he was to come out of this thing alive. He was a smart man, for the final curtain was about to unfold on the tragic drama that was Billy's life and that of his pals. Two months after Scurlock left the gang, his pockets (I hope) jingling from the split proceeds of the one-hundred head of Chisum cattle stolen the same

month, Billy killed his next man.

After Scurlock quit the gang, Billy spent his time in Fort Sumner having a good time gambling, and drinking; punctuated by a killing which is savored in history books as the Joe Grant killing (Fulton 1968:372). A short time after shooting Grant dead, Billy met up with John Chisum and demanded that John pay him five hundred dollars for services rendered by Billy. Chisum talked Billy out of killing him, and did not bother to pay the money demanded. Billy's rebuttal to this was to tell John, in clear terms, that he would steal Chisum cattle for payment in leiu of cash (Fulton 1968: 380).

Now, to me, Billy was being pretty rash and pretty damn unfair about things. Here Billy sits in the gambling joints of Fort Sumner, drinking and gambling, and living off the divided proceeds of one hundred head of Chisum cattle stolen a few months earlier. I realize that stolen cattle have to be sold at a slight discount, but some two-thousand dollars should have been realized from the sale of the hundred head of cattle. Of course split five ways, it figures about four-hundred dollars per outlaw, not bad money when the average cowboy at that time earned thirty dollars a month. This facts went unrecognized by Billy as he sat in some bar in Fort Sumner hollering at John about finances. I would say Billy had a lot of gall, and a character flaw, judging from this incident, but I would not call him a cold blooded murderer--you had to piss him off first, and John was gray haired and smooth of tongue and unarmed and took pains not

to upset the Boy Bandit King. John lived to brag about this exploit before he died of health complications a few years after this incident.

I know we all see more than we understand, but generally, you can tell the character and moral fiber of a person by the company that person keeps. Most of us fall in the gray area, we try to be good citizens but sometimes we fail and fall in the outlaw category. Most of us will occasionally go over the speeding limit, but we don't go on and kill the cop, then start stealing and hanging out with other known bad men. Well, that is what Billy did, of course times were different, and we should not judge them by our own standards. If not ours then whose? I think they should be judged by their own generation. So, that said, let us judge Billy by his own contemporaries, as we monitor his actions.

Dave Radabaugh (also spelled Rudabaugh) was the most feared, most dangerous, and meanest man in New Mexico according to some accounts (Fulton 1968: 380). Dave joined Billy's gang in January 1880 (Fulton 1968: 380). He came well recommended, having robbed the U. S. mail, later killing his jailer in Las Vegas and escaping, he now was free to pursue his banditry. Citizens of that town were once so enraged over the killing that they formed a lynch mob and set out after him. They would have lynched him had not Garrett intervened.

Another unsavory character also joined Billy, Bowdre, O'Folliard and Dave Radabaugh. His name was David L. Anderson, alias Billy

Wilson, counterfeiter and former Texan. He continued with the outlaw gang until he was captured at Stinking Springs in December 1880. Billy had recruited a desperate, mean man, in Dave Radabaugh, and together they continued to raid cattle herds that grazed the grama covered area of southern New Mexico. In a few months, the local newspapers would carry articles of the gangs activities, and describe them as "the scourge of cattlemen" (Fulton 1968:380). This cattle rustling continued unabated until the fall of 1880, when Billy, Bowdre, and O'Folliard made the mistake of frequenting White Oaks, the new gold mining town settled almost a year earlier when gold was discovered on nearby Baxter Mountain.

A posse from White Oaks followed the outlaws trail to the Greathouse Ranch, situated northeast of White Oaks. A gun fight erupted and men were killed, but Bonney, Bowdre, and O'Folliard escaped and fled. About this time they must have visited the Three Rivers area, for Pat Coghlan, owner of the Three Rivers Ranch was arrested for buying stolen cattle from Billy's band of outlaws (Fulton 1968: 383). Elections were held in Lincon County, and Patrick Floyd Garrett was elected sheriff. He would began his tenure as sheriff in January 1881, but he wasted no time for formalities in pursuing the outlaws. He was deputized and set out on his now famous man-hunt that would end in death. First to die was young Tom O'Folliard, as he rode unsuspecting into Fort Sumner and Garrett's waiting posse. Tom could have, should have left the gang, a decision and transition that the Coe brothers and Scurlock had successfully made. Some say you make

decisions in life, and that you have to live with those decisions. Well in Tom's case, he could not live with his decision; Garrett made sure of that (when he got the lead out).

As I reflect back on my own life (35 years) I am aware of various conscientous images of mortality and the varying realities of death. As early as 18 years of age I remember that I could not be killed. I was immortal, ten foot tall and bullet proof. A few shotgun blasts to the face and neck, and a car falling off its jacks with me under it and I no longer felt bullet proof or immortal. Billy and his bunch never lived past my own ripe age of 35, and did not have the chance to develope my attitude toward death and immortality. So, it is with remorse and reflection, that I relate the deaths of these young men. I don't think they understood the gravity of their situation being so young and all.

Tom O'Folliard rode at the head of the gang that fatal December 18, 1880. William Bonney, Charlie Bowdre, Dave Radabaugh, Billy Wilson, and new gang-member Tom Pickett followed alongside or close behind. Likely, Tom's mind was filled with thoughts of getting out of the cold December night while Bowdre visited with his wife who resided at Fort Sumner. As the horse under him trodded into Fort Sumner, gunshots rang out in the cold, snow filled December night and Tom slumped forward in his saddle and cried out "Don't shoot Garrett, I'm killed" (Scanland 1908:25). For two hours he lived as Garrett pumped information from him about the gang and its members. After Tom died, Garrett and his possee continued on their manhunt.

Poor Charlie Bowdre had to flee Fort Sumner without seeing his wife that night, or any other night. He was the next to go down, in a blast of gunfire two days later at a place called Stinking Springs where Garrett's men "dusted him" (Fulton 1968:384). The gang had fled Fort Sumner and took refuge from the inclement weather, thinking Garrett had gone back. Garrett, always a vain man and always somewhat short of what I consider chivalrous, told his posse members that he was going to kill the Kid without a warning or a chance to surrender.

About daylight, Charlie Bowdre stepped out of the house wearing what looked like Billy's hat and Pat Garrett and his men opened fire. They then realized that they had nailed the wrong man (Scanland 1908:26). Garrett reportedly said that Bowdre came towards him with his hands up and said "I wish-- I wish-- and then in a whisper "I am dying!" (Scanland 1908:26). Garrett laid him down on a blanket and he soon died without ever telling Garrett what he wished for. Did he wish he had chose to leave the gang and the area, or had he wished for a better chance to fight for his life, or had he wished he had stayed in Fort Sumner with his wife, taking his chances at eluding Garrett and his men. We will never know. If you live by the gun, you die by the gun, you can wish in one hand and poop in the other and see which one gets fuller faster. Bowdre should have known that the road to hell is paved with good intentions and wishing doesn't cut it out west.

Meanwhile, Billy the Kid, Dave Radabaugh, Wilson and Tom Pickett continued to hold out against hunger and cold. About 4 o'clock

that evening the men surrendered and were taken to Las Vegas, then to Santa Fe (Scanland 1908: 27). Billy the Kid and Billy Wilson were transferred to Mesilla to stand trial. Billy Wilson was to be tried for passing a counterfeit $100 bill, while Bonney was to stand trial on a federal charge for murdering Sheriff Brady (Fulton 1968:390-391). After the case was heard, the jury readily returned at verdict of guilty. On April 13, 1881, federal Judge Bristol formally sentenced the Kid to be hanged at Lincoln on the 13th of May 1881 (Fulton 1968:391).

Scarely two weeks later, Billy killed his two guards, Bell and Ollinger and escaped from the Lincoln County Courthouse where he had been held awaiting the gallows (Fulton 1968: 393). On July 14, 1881, Pat Garrett caught Billy the Kid coming into Pete Maxwell's bedroom and fired two shots, the first crashing into young Billy's heart, and the other lodging in a piece of furniture in the bedroom. He was buried the next day in a small graveyard near Fort Sumner. He was interred next to his two outlaw pals, Bowdre and O'Folliard.

Billy almost slipped into obscurity, and was fast becoming unknown until 1925. That year saw the publication of Walter Noble Burn's Saga of Billy the Kid. Even though it is passed off as non-fiction, it is largely a work of fiction and inaccurate in many details, but it served to launch Billy into international stardom long after he died. Since 1925, over 400 literary works centered on Billy the Kid have been written, and the Billy the Kid legend continues to grow. Perhaps Ralph Randolph Reynolds,

the chap that is buried here in Bent read the Saga of Billy the Kid, and enamored by that saga, shortly before his death requested that "Rode with Billy the Kid" be etched into his own tombstone, such are the whims of history at times. Archaeological inquiry is next as we interpret this hideout of Billy the Kid's.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF BILLY THE KID'S ROBLEDO MOUNTAIN HIDEOUT

The Robledo Mountian Hideout site is located in the Robledo Mountains northwest of Dona Ana, New Mexico and on the west side of the Rio Grande. The sheltered hideout is situated on the western face of a steep, pointed mountain which overlooks the nearby region and offered a commanding view of the country-side (See Figures 3 and 4). The local geology consists of rhyolitic and andesitic rocks formed during the Tertiary period. Soils are sandy, with abundant angular detritus material. The area is semi-arid, and supports creosote, sumac or squaw bush, four-wing saltbush, yucca, Apache plume, and various species of grasses. Three small trees grow in the southern end of the hideout and offer some shade, these trees are seen in Figures 6 and 7. Though not certain, they appear to be hackberry trees. Trees may or may not have been present during the outlaws usage, those presently thriving in the hideout are felt to be too small in stature to be very old.

A major drainage of this low-lying range of hills is located a few hundred yards north of the hideout. The bottom of this